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**Slovenia's Foreign and Defense Policies  
Participation on Discussion Panel  
AASSS Annual Conference  
December 5, 2004**

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**I. Introduction**

- a. Former German defense minister Volker R  he once remarked that, "You can join the Atlantic Alliance with old tanks, but joining the EU with old farm tractors causes problems." Well, frankly, Slovenia's problem was the opposite: no tanks and new tractors.
- b. The invitations extended to Slovenia to join the European Union and NATO were the culmination of years of intense Slovene lobbying to reinstate themselves into what Slovenes believed is their rightful place in East Central Europe. My talk today discusses that process as I provide an overview of Slovene foreign and defense policies. My intent is not to dwell on details, rather, I'll provide you with some of the most important events and milestones, as well as my own analytical conclusions as to what this could mean for your tenure in Slovenia.
- c. I'd like to note I developed this talk not through the lens of a particular theoretical orientation, though the elite and political culture approaches are my first two choices in understanding the development of Slovene foreign and defense policy.
- d. Most important, I'd like you to bear in mind throughout my talk is that the pursuit of Slovene national interests is a combination of:
  - i. cultural identity – long seen itself as a member of Central Europe, not the Balkans,
  - ii. pragmatism – realization that it is a small state in a large world,
  - iii. national security – there remain real threats that it may not be able to handle independently.

After the dissolution of the federal Yugoslav state in 1991, Slovenia resumed its long-interrupted traditional political and cultural orientation toward Europe. Slovenia had the ability to effect this change, for it is in a unique and enviable position not shared by its Southern Slav neighbors. As the most economically advanced state of the six former Yugoslav republics, coupled with the least physical and societal destruction after Yugoslavia's bloody collapse, Slovenia was and remains in an advantageous position to progress westward. In short, Slovenia came to an early realization that the West was Slovenia's principal hope for a more prosperous and secure future.

Slovenia is a small state in a world of small states. Of the over 190 members of the United Nations, 130 have populations of less than 10 million. But whereas small states enjoy a numerical majority in a state-centered world based in the Westphalian system of international politics, practically speaking a small state has a comparatively small voice in the world. Slovenia, with its population of under two million, is frankly a very small voice. But instead of despair, Slovenia recognized its comparative advantages and

inherent strengths. Slovenia's consistent conclusion is that it can be a player on the international scene, but Slovenia's maximum strength can only come through participation in the strongest and most vibrant intergovernmental organizations. The modern global system and Slovenia's place in that system makes the wisdom of this orientation clear.

In the ten years since Slovenia gained independence, it has moved forward economically and politically. Although Slovenia's overall future appears bright, there are three overriding concerns to its continued progress:

1. Economic stagnation;
2. Instability in the Balkan Peninsula; and
3. Transnational threats, particularly those threats from organized crime and population migration.

Transition – Recognizing these three concerns, membership in the European Union became an early and tangible foreign policy goal.

## **II. Foreign policy**

### **a. Introduction**

- i. Slovenia is a case study for the academic maxim that “the rapid growth of international organizations has given even the smallest states both life and a voice in international affairs.” In other words, Slovenia has engaged in as many regional and international organizations as possible.
  - ii. From the moment of its independence, according to Zoltan Barany, Slovenia has conducted an unambiguously pro-Western foreign policy, having abandoned the federal Yugoslavia's non-alignment approach. This uncompromised Western orientation has continued under all Slovene governments. And the top foreign policy priority was membership in the European Union.
- b. After sovereignty, Slovenia had two immediate tasks:
- i. 1) To gain influential supporters willing to recognize an independent Slovenia, mainly through appeals to Austria and Germany, and
  - ii. 2) To convince the international community that Slovenia is not a part of the Balkans, which it achieved by distancing itself from the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. However, by the late 1990s, Slovenia realized that its isolationist mentality toward the rest of the former Yugoslavia hindered its efforts and it could actually benefit from acting as a bridge between Central Europe and the Balkans.
- c. Overview of organizations and then feedback
- i. Since independence, Slovenia has conducted a responsible, mature and ~~constructive foreign policy~~ <sup>active</sup> regional entities, such as the Council of Europe, the OSCE, the Danube Cooperation, the European Union and, of course, the UN.
  - ii. Though there have been sometimes emotive verbal clashes, overall Slovenia maintains good relations with all of its neighbors.

#### d. Implications

- i. As James Gow and Cathy Carmichael relate, "Integration into European and international life poses dilemmas for Slovenia and the Slovenes because in international terms sovereignty implies a process of opening up, whereas internal sovereignty has largely been built through language and culture, the hallmarks of national particularity"
- ii. Slovenia embodies this dichotomy: it has for the first time an independent identity yet internationalization is forcing some homogenization. Recent events surrounding opposition to building a mosque for Slovenia's 60,000 Muslims bears this out.
- iii. Moreover, Slovenia is anomalous in that all levels of politics – from the most liberal to the most conservative – looked first to joining the EU despite having independence for the first time in its history.
- iv. Slovenia will continue to act within a multinational context, yet will have internal opposition to any institution that may water down its identity. Any reforms and further integration will tend to be elite driven.
- v. The US enjoys a strong positive public opinion, in no small part because of ethnic ties to the US. US foreign policies then may build upon this base, though Slovenia will most likely defer to the EU, such as during debates over the International Criminal Court and Iraq.
- vi. To return to my three themes, Slovenia's foreign policy, especially as it relates to its singular focus on EU membership, reflects its **cultural identity** as a Central European state, **pragmatism** that a its small state can only be heard through a larger context, and that it cannot ensure its **national security** on its own.

Transition - While the European Union can provide tangible, long-term benefits, Slovenia made membership in NATO a goal as far back as 1989, long before independence.

### III. Defense policy

#### a. Introduction

- i. Perceptions of security have changed dramatically since the end of the Cold War, where countries feel paradoxically both safer and more insecure.
- ii. Slovenia's geo-strategic position on the Balkan Peninsula served to force early action in the security realm.
- iii. I believe that of the ECE states, Slovenia ranks very high in its deeds and actions in defense policy.
- iv. Again, Slovenia's actions reflect my three observations – cultural identity, pragmatism, and its view of national security.

#### b. Background

- i. Began to develop some military independence before dissolution of the Yugoslav state. all ~~hjt removing itself from mandatory~~

- ii. Found itself in security limbo after the March 1991 dissolution of the Warsaw Pact
- iii. 10-day war of independence great source of pride - victory more a function of Yugoslav withdrawal than overwhelming battlefield success
- iv. More to fear than "hard" threats
  - 1. ECE states realized there was no real alternative to NATO
- c. Current security threats
  - i. Why have a military?
    - 1. Difficult to justify any serious threats of invasion
    - 2. But, two good reasons to keep military
      - a. To maintain a force capable of deterring cross-border incursion
      - b. To demonstrate that Slovenia is a responsible member of the international community
  - ii. Transnational threats
    - 1. Drugs
    - 2. Money laundering
    - 3. Human trafficking
    - 4. Transnational migration
  - iii. Balkans' proximity

Slovenia decided early on that there were compelling reasons to maintain a military but to enhance its capability with membership in regional organizations, with NATO as the ultimate goal.

The 1990s were a decade of tumult in defense policy, especially after Slovenia failed to receive an invitation to join NATO in 1997. Lack of funds, low esteem for the military as a profession, a lack of military and security reform, and a corrupt defense ministry did little to foster the development of sound policy as well. Despite all theses, Slovenia has in fact developed a reasonable military for a country its size.

- d. Current military actions
  - i. Size and composition
    - 1. Two full brigades - On to support peace operations/One supplementary
    - 2. A recent conversation with State Secretary Milan Jazbec, a number two in the Ministry of Defense: Goal - full professionalization of the armed forces by 2010
      - a. 8,500 professional
      - b. 4,500 reservists
  - ii. Activities
    - 1. Participated in over 50 joint military events and organized several major joint military exercises (over 1,000 troops)
  - iii. Defense minister
    - 1. Traditionally much turmoil in the post of the defense minister

2. Current minister – Anton Grizold – a respected academic and minister – good insight and bureaucratic skills

e. Conclusions/Implications

- i. NATO membership – the major security objective – fulfilled
- ii. NATO membership more an endorsement of “Western-ness” than a commitment to security
- iii. Not much capability – many units dual-use for civilian emergency
  1. Seeking niche – mountain capability/NBC capability
  2. Especially able to aid in non-hostile action, i.e., peacekeeping
- iv. May be a conduit for the US, but ultimately will defer to the EU (i.e., not a Poland)
- v. Forgoing complete military – for example, no air force – in return for reliance on NATO and EU – a real commitment to the West

#### IV. Conclusion

After a decade of independence, Slovenia is a prosperous and stable country that maintains a realistic view of its place in the world. Realizing that in order for a small country to be heard it must work within a multinational context. Slovene foreign policy has been unwavering in its western orientation since independence, though I believe that in a conflict between the EU and the US, Slovenia will, no doubt with sophistication and diplomacy, defer to the EU.

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